



ASIA/CHINA - Death of Mgr. Joseph Fan Zhongliang, Bishop of Shanghai: always committed to serving the Church in spite of great difficulties

Shanghai (Agenzia Fides) – His Exc. Mgr. Joseph Fan Zhongliang, S.I., Bishop of the Diocese of Shanghai (Mainland China), died on March 16, at the age of 96. The Prelate was born on January 13, 1918: He was baptized on 11 May 1932, and was given the name Joseph. On August 30, 1938 he entered the Society of Jesus and was ordained a priest on May 31, 1951.

Four years later, on September 8, 1955 he was arrested for counter-revolutionary crimes together with the then Bishop of Shanghai, Mgr. Ignatius Gung Pinmei, S.I., and other priests. In 1958 he was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. After his release in 1978, he was a teacher at a middle school for some years, without being allowed to return to Shanghai.

On 26 February 1985, he was ordained coadjutor Bishop of Shanghai in secret by His Exc. Mgr. Matthias Lu Zhensheng, Bishop of Tianshui, Gansu province. In 2000, with the death of Cardinal Gong Pinmei, Mgr. Fan succeeded him as Bishop of Shanghai. He was never recognized by the Chinese authorities and, therefore, was forbidden to carry out his pastoral duty.

He was loved and respected by the Chinese Catholic community and the universal Church, Mgr. Fan had always been committed to serving the Church in spite of the great difficulties in which he was found to carry out his ministry. Inspired by great pastoral zeal, he personally administered the sacraments to the faithful; he founded the Diocesan religious women's Congregation "Immaculate Heart of Mary", and was always available for the priests and for the other Bishops who came to him asking for collaboration and advice.

After his death, a throng of mourners gathered outside the funeral home where Fan's body was laid out.

With the death of Bishop Fan, the Church in China has lost a courageous witness of fidelity to Christ, the Church and the Holy Father. The universal Church assures its closeness and prayers to the diocese of Shanghai.

On March 22, about five thousand faithful of the diocese of Shanghai and other dioceses in China took part in the solemn funeral. The Mass was presided over by Rev. Joseph Zhu Yude, S.I. with other 61 priests who concelebrated. Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin was not present, but was able to send a wreath. The Bishop in his blog remembered Bishop Fan, quoting the Book of Sirach: "...walked with the Lord and was taken up to heaven, that succeeding generations might learn by his example... Then he increased the glory of Aaron, and bestowed upon him his inheritance: the sacred offerings he allotted to him, with the showbread as his potion" (Sir 44,16, 45,20). (Agenzia Fides 27/03/2014)